

POLICY / COMMUNITY AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING

Monday, September 30, 2013

Oliver Administration Building

Present

Subcommittee: William O'Dell, Chair, Diana Campbell and Lynn Wainwright

School Committee, Administration & Guests: Melinda L. Thies, Superintendent; Mario Andrade, Asst. Superintendent; Donald Rebello, Principal Mt. Hope High School; John Saviano and Marjorie McBride

Meeting called to order by Bill O. at 6:03 p.m.

Approval of Minutes

MOTION: Lynn W. motioned to approve the minutes of the September 3, 2013 meeting; Diana C. seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Introduction Student Conduct and Discipline (JFC)

Bill O. welcomed Don R. and explained that a Q & A format will be followed. Diana C. asked if the School Committee is considering adjusting Policy JFC. Bill O. explained that he received a request to add these items to the agenda to determine if they are working and being enforced. Bill O. opened the floor to questions.

Lynn W. thanked Don R. for attending and referenced the second paragraph of policy JFC, where it states “a copy of the policies and the procedures shall be published and made available...to each student and his/her guardian.” Lynn W. asked how these documents are disseminated and if administration can ensure that each family receives them. Don R. explained that the policies are included in the student handbook. There is also a form in each student handbook that requires a parents/guardians signature, attesting to the fact that they received a copy of the handbook. The signed forms are then submitted to the Dean’s Office. It is unacceptable for a student not to submit this form. Administration makes every effort to obtain these forms from every student and has a good return rate. The signed forms have also been helpful in dealing with student disciplinary issues where a parent may claim being unaware of a particular policy.

Bill O. established that a policy is currently in place and asked Don R. if he felt that the policy is working. Don R. responded that the policy is working.

Bristol Warren Regional Schools Code of Discipline (JG)

Bill O. and Diana C. both stated that they have no issues with policy JG. Lynn W. asked Melinda T. if this policy applies to all schools in the District. Melinda T. responded that Policy JG is a School Committee Policy. Therefore, the broader aspects of the policy do

apply to all schools, however, there is a section that outlines items specific to Kickemuit, Mt. Hope and the elementary schools. Diana C. asked if the KMS Discipline Code item J. “abusive, vulgar, or profane language in school” warrants a 1 day out of school suspension. Melinda T. responded that this is ultimately up to the administrator. If the language disrupts instruction it could warrant suspension.

Lynn W. asked if confiscation of cell phones for possession, as noted on page 7 of Policy JG, is being enforced. Don R. explained that students have a legal right to possess. Marj M. stated that this language is from a former law regarding pagers in schools. Diana C. asked if this language should be revised. Don R. commented that this is a relevant topic. Many schools have modified their policies related to “smart devices” and internet access, with many teachers supporting the use of these devices for internet access. Don R. suggested that the District rethink how it phrases the prohibition of smart devices, noting that wireless internet will be available in all buildings. Don R. also noted that language in the handbook has been changed in the past in response to teacher request. Last year the language regarding headphone use was revised in response to requests from some teachers that felt music inspired creativity. The revised language prohibits headphone use in the hallways and cafeteria, but gives discretion to teachers in their classrooms. Marj M. stated that many students have cell phones that aren’t smart devices and that this distinction should be made clear. Mario A. stated that he has been working with Paul Morris in researching appropriate use

of technology. The Burlington, MA model incorporates a list of appropriate vs. inappropriate use in their policy. Melinda T. asked if Mario A. would consider drafting a similar list that may be worked into our policy. Mario A. agreed to work on a list. Bill O. clarified that Policy JG is in need of revision at this time as it is illegal to confiscate for possession alone.

Code of Discipline (Handbook)

Quoting from page 35 of the high school handbook, Lynn W. referenced the exception to the use of electronic devices. She voiced concern about allowing students to use iPods in the classroom at the teacher's discretion. This policy may not be enforceable as the teacher has no way to determine if the content of what the student is listening to is appropriate. Don R. confirmed that teachers do have discretion in this matter and agreed that we may not have the ability to monitor content. However, he asked the Subcommittee to consider what is occurring in nearby progressive schools. Great progress is being made in the appropriate use of technology. He cautioned against "inhibiting the progress of the overall majority in favor of exclusively prohibiting use, it is a philosophical choice."

Bill O. noted that the sections outlining the use of electronic devices in both Policy JG and the high school handbook require attention. He asked that high school administration draft language reflective of what they would like to see taking place at the high school. Melinda T.

suggested that a list of acceptable, appropriate use should be included. Don R. agreed that appropriate use should be specifically defined.

Marj M. asked if there is anything contained in the handbook that is not being enforced. Don R. responded that enforcement is taking place, however, there are challenges. The use of headphones during passing time is an issue. Of the entire student population, only 90 to 100 students do not use headphones daily. This is a cultural practice and one that is shared by all students including those on the honor roll. Don R. quoted from page 18 of the student handbook “during passing time, earphones of any kind may not be worn in the corridors or classrooms.” Bill O. established that, since this is clearly defined in the handbook, it is an enforcement issue. He added that it is a safety concern. Diana C. suggested a campaign to raise awareness about the dangers of such use. Don R. feels that such a campaign wouldn’t be acceptable to any club or student. Students do not see this as a problem. It is ingrained in them as an accepted, cultural practice. Melinda T. stated that the cultural aspect is the critical issue to consider. Lynn W. stated that enforcement is essential. If it can’t be enforced, it should be removed from the handbook and if it stays in the handbook, it needs to be enforced. Bill O. asked if this should remain in the handbook. Marj M. stated that what is in the book is appropriate. Don R. suggested that administration and the School Committee engage students in dialogue about this issue and consider options such as the appropriateness of students being

allowed to listen to music knowing that they can still hear the fire alarm. Don R. suggested hosting a forum at the high school or inviting students to a School Committee meeting. Marj M. would like students to be made aware that this is not just an arbitrary rule, the Subcommittee feels strongly about this because it is a safety issue. John S. agrees that open communication between students, administrators and School Committee members through a meeting or forum would be effective and may also take some of the burden off of teachers. Bill O. stated that buy-in from students would be more effective than policing, reiterating that this is a matter of enforcement.

Student Dress Code Policy (JFCA)

Lynn W. asked if the student dress code section of the high school handbook is being enforced. Don R. explained that any member of the administrative team can “mete out discipline for an infraction.” The majority of cases are handled by administration. Of the sixty-five offenses this year, fifty-five were from administration and five to ten were referrals from teachers. Page 17 of the handbook lists explicit definitions, which are being enforced without variation. Don R. added that some male teachers are reluctant to make referrals of infractions by female students. Diana C. suggested a process by which a teacher could make an anonymous referral.

Don R. added that apparel displaying inappropriate logos is another violation of the dress code policy. If an infraction of this type takes place, the student is instructed to change or go home. While the

school does not provide a change of clothes, in most cases the student has one with them. Lynn W. asked if support staff is charged with enforcing the dress code policy as well. Don R. explained that they do not enforce but they do make referrals.

Marj M. added that the ACLU prohibits the district from adding too much detail to Policy JFCA.

Cheating Policy

Lynn W. is pleased with the detail provided in the student handbook. However, she would like to see language regarding the forging of parent signatures added. She also suggested adding instructions on appropriate measures for substitute teachers who suspect cheating. Bill O. asked if there is a penalty for plagiarism. Don. R. stated that penalties are listed in the student handbook (pg. 37). Lynn W. asked if the high school uses filtering software to detect plagiarism. Don. R. replied that there are various programs that some teachers use. Marj M. suggested looking at using these programs more broadly. Mario A. agreed to research plagiarism filtering programs.

Academic Eligibility Discussion

Bill O. stated that official consensus has not been reached on this policy. Marj M. explained that this is a high school policy that appears in the student handbook. She would like to see a School Committee policy adopted that would also include the middle school. Melinda T. stated that in order for this to happen there should be clear

alignment between school-based administrators and the School Committee. Lynn W. asked if administrators are opposed to the current language. Melinda T. replied that the current policy may be one of the most restrictive in the state in that one failure excludes students from participation. Don R. added that in some cases participation in an extra-curricular activity is the only positive influence in a student's life. It may be viewed as excessive to completely eliminate that positive influence because of one failure. Administrators and members of the community worked together for a year to develop a plan that they thought was fair. This plan includes supports for students such as tutoring, extra help and validation of progress by teachers. Marj M. stated that she doesn't completely disagree, however, she is concerned that the policy has been changed twice without the School Committee's knowledge. Melinda T. clarified that a logistical issue was the cause of the most recent change going out before review by the School Committee.

Diana C. stated that she would like reassurance that students will be monitored. She cited a past example where a student wasn't monitored and "fell through the cracks." Don R. explained that as a result of this particular situation, the following language was added to the policy "a student's failure or refusal to comply with this requirement will result in the immediate forfeiture of participation eligibility..." The addition of this language addressed the monitoring issue. Lynn W. asked if this policy is applicable to band students. Don R. explained that certain programs are exempt because they are

part of the academic curriculum. Band is one of those programs.

Lynn W. asked if parents are notified of a student's academic standing before first semester grades are released. Don R. stated that a mid-quarter report is issued to each student half way through each term. A total of four mid-quarter reports and four report cards are issued during the year. Parents are notified of release dates via the website, ConnectEd and the school calendar. For those teachers who use iParent, grades are posted there as well. Melinda T. added that an administrative decision was made at KMS that all teachers use iParent.

Bill O. reiterated that there isn't a current School Committee policy pertaining to academic eligibility. The Committee has been tasked with considering adopting an academic eligibility policy. The Chair so directs high school administration to draft policy language regarding academic eligibility. Diana C. suggested including a philosophical statement.

New Policy Development – Administrative Procedure Discussion

Bill O. introduced the Administrative Procedure document and asked the Subcommittee how they would like to proceed. Marj M. commented that this document was created as a means of addressing the academic eligibility situation. Bill O. stated that this situation has been addressed with the directive from the Chair for the Superintendent to submit policy language. Diana C. commented that

she doesn't see a need to address this document at this time. Bill O. agreed to hold off on this for now.

New Policy Language

RI Gen Laws 16-53.1-3 Duties of School Improvement Teams

RI Gen Laws 16.53.1-4 Severability

Marj M. stated that according to RI General Law 16-53.1-2 "The school board shall review membership composition of each school improvement team." This is not being done. Diana C. added that the law also states that the school board shall establish procedures. Lynn W. suggested that each school improvement team present an end-of-year report to the School Committee. Melinda T. stated that all schools are scheduled to deliver presentations at upcoming School Committee Workshops beginning in October.

John S. shared that he attended a SIT meeting at Mt. Hope and was very impressed with the level of discussion and participation. Melinda T. commented that Mt. Hope has a very active, high-functioning SIT comprised of some forty members focused on academic goals and student achievement. Don R. added that the academic eligibility discussion evolved from a SIT meeting discussion regarding graduation rates. Lynn W. asked how many kids were in danger of failing. Don R. responded statistically at the end of last year, 20% were in danger of failing one class.

Bill O. stated that the District should adopt SIT guidelines. He

suggested quoting RI General Laws 16-53.1-3 and 16-53.1-4 and adopting this as District policy. Mario A. agreed to draft this language.

Policy Review List

Bill O. removed Policies BG, BBAA and BCB from the policy review list. He still has to make an announcement on BCE-R.

Add: proposed Academic Eligibility Policy from high school administration, policy language regarding electronic devices from high school administration and SIT Policy from Mario A.

Future Agenda Items

- **Cheating Policy**
- **Student Code of Discipline**
- **New Policy Development – Administrative Procedure Discussion**
- **Academic Eligibility**
- **Policy Review List**
- **School Admissions Policy (JEC) (Proof of Residency Documents)**

Next meeting will be held on November 4, 2013.

Adjournment

MOTION: At 8:00 pm Lynn W. motioned to adjourn; Diana C. seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

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